

Quality Assurance in Universities in the Muslim World: Obstacles and Solutions

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Abstract

Human beings are creatures from unknown to known. The struggle of human being on earth is to gain freedom back to his initial abode. The intellectual and spiritual endowment that was given to man in creation is not only to worship (Allah) as command, but it's also serves as a divine gift from the creator; to enable him develop himself in a balance mode. This intellectual acumen given to man by Allah is to make him respond adequately to his environmental challenges by being creative in response to his need at a time. The creative tendencies endowed to man made it possible for him to discover and develop ideas that are capable of satisfying the needs of the entire human race. Today, these creative abilities of man have manifested in different forms among them are: product design, handicraft, Auto-mobile assembly-line, Education, culture and moral. These endowed resources of man; which enables him to generate idea, synthesis product, acquire and disseminate useful information have attracted different nomenclature which varies over the years. It was initially tagged labor, later to manpower, to human resources and the most resent name is human capital. Having identify these potentials in man, and its ability to transform concrete resources into a profitable use, maintaining these qualities in human being become a yardstick in determining "quality". Quality assurance/Total Quality Management, Quality product, Quality material, Quality service, Quality Education, Quality Health e.t.c. are variations of quality, which are largely premised on human potentials and creativity. This paper shall therefore provide a summary of status of quality of education in universities in Muslim world and critically analyses the issue of quality with the backdrop of problems, constraints, and conflicts. Towards the end, suggests appropriate solutions with several alternatives, to improve quality, discussing also their feasibility. The general objective is to develop strategies for improving quality assurance in the Universities in the Muslim word.

Introduction

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acumen given to man by Allah is to make him respond adequately to his environmental challenges by being creative in response to his need at a time. The creative tendencies endowed to man made it possible for him to discover and develop ideas that are capable of satisfying the needs of the entire human race. Today, these creative abilities of man have manifested in different forms among them are: product design, handcraft, Auto-mobile assembly-line, Education, culture and moral. These endowed resources of man; which enables him to generate idea, synthesis product, acquire and disseminate useful information have attracted different nomenclature which have varies over the years. It was initially tagged labor, later to manpower, to human resources and the most resent name is human capital.

According to Shewhart (2000) Quality assurance is the process of verifying or determining whether products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. Quality assurance is a process-driven approach with specific steps to help define and attain goals. This process considers design, development, production, and service. The most popular tool used to determine quality assurance is the Shewhart Cycle, developed by Dr. W. Edwards Deming. This cycle for quality assurance consists of four steps: *Plan*, *Do*, *Check*, and *Act*. These steps are commonly abbreviated as PDCA.

The four quality assurance steps within the PDCA model stand for:

- **Plan:** Establish objectives and processes required to deliver the desired results.
- **Do:** Implement the process developed.
- **Check:** Monitor and evaluate the implemented process by testing the results against the predetermined objectives
- **Act:** Apply actions necessary for improvement if the results require changes.

PDCA is an effective method for monitoring quality assurance because it analyzes existing conditions and methods used to provide the product or service customers. The goal is to ensure that excellence is inherent in every component of the process. Quality assurance also helps determine whether the steps used to provide the product or services are appropriate for the time and conditions. In addition, if the PDCA cycle is repeated throughout the lifetime of the product or service, it helps improve internal company efficiency. Quality assurance demands a degree of detail in order to be fully implemented at every step. *Planning*, for example, could include investigation into the quality of the raw materials used in manufacturing, the actual assembly, or the inspection processes used. The *Checking* step could include customer feedback, surveys, or other marketing vehicles to determine if customer needs are being exceeded and why they are or are not. *Acting* could mean a total revision in the manufacturing process in order to correct a technical or cosmetic flaw.

Competition to provide specialized products and services results in breakthroughs as well as long-term growth and change. Quality assurance verifies that any customer offering, regardless if it is new or evolved is produced and offered with the best possible materials, in the most comprehensive way, with the highest standards. The goal to exceed customer expectations in a measurable and accountable process is provided by quality assurance.

Obstacles to Quality Assurance in Muslims University

Nationalism

Nationalism has decomposed both the power and prestige of the Muslims that were vested in their unity from time of immemorial. It has eroded away the might of Ummah- intellectual, political, economy, Education and social-well being which were collectively enshrined in the unity of the early Muslims that made them to be indomitable to any nation in the past- in terms of knowledge, spiritual and social justice. The fragments of all these prestigious attributes today are found in some sacred rites of Ummah. The word Nationalism is not use to connote political system or geographical polarization of Muslims nations, the term is rather employed to denote the dichotomy that has engulfed the identities of the contemporary Muslim Ummah.

Every Muslims is now wearing his/her nation's "Logo" and not the logo of the collective Ummah. This paves way for some well to do Muslims nations to shy away from the collective goal of the Ummah, the snow-ball effect of this is the dwindling in the quality of output of Universities in the Muslim world. One may ask how this affects the qualities of Universities in the Muslims world. Me and my country orientation has prevented effective acquisition and dissemination of knowledge among Universities in the Muslim world, this is particularly true because, apart from the fact that the process of acquiring and disseminating knowledge in most Muslim nations are based on the need of their people alone and not on the collective need of the Ummah in general. Thus, this myopic perception led to establishment of most Universities in Muslims nation on the parochial need of their people alone. Better still, the curriculum, learning and teaching in most Muslims nation are channel to reflect culture and value perceived to be good for their people alone. The pernicious of this on the quality of education is that each Muslim nation is so overwhelm with the goal of their country at the expense of collective goal of the Ummah.

In spite of the effort to identify and satisfy the educational needs of their people, most Muslims countries have little or no confidence in their manpower and the manpower of other Muslims nation. This is the reason why some Muslim nations prefer to bring expert from the west to complete some laudable projects in their countries, even if the same can be perfectly done by the neighboring Muslims state. Since the elite in the Muslims communities hitherto have no doubt that quality of education their children will benefit in the western Universities is far better than that of his/her own country or any other Muslims nation, the quality of Muslims Universities will continue to diminish, because those who are to contribute positively to enhance the quality of the Universities do not belief in their services.

Most of Muslims countries of today have no confidence in others, they do not see other Muslims nations and their citizens having common goal and objective with them, they only share common belief under the guise of religion where necessary, but the practical goal and object needed to collectively build Muslim Ummah "is yet to see the green light of unity". This is the reason why it is very difficult to develop a unified certificate that can be use as an entry requirement into Universities in the Muslims world. My country and I (nationalism) as stagnate some of the progress that would have been made in Muslims Universities today. It has attracted fads like nepotism, favoritism, ethnocentrism among others. In a situation where nations cannot interchange knowledge among themselves, they hardly see anything beneficial to them in Muslim personnel from another country. They prefer to use their countrymen even if they are not

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competent to handle the situation or any strategic post. It is high time we started to appreciate capabilities of our own people and come together as one under the umbrella of Ummah. It is time we allow free movement of lecturers, teachers and students and shun the issue of geographical demarcation among ourselves, as it was practice in the time of the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), the guided companions and those that follow them.

Nationalism introduced by the west is now fading out of their soil, but its root is firmly stationed in some of the Muslims country of today. The western countries are now designing strategies to completely obliterate nationalism; they have introduced Euro currency, Shengen Visa, common language and easy transfer of manpower and citizenship status of immigrant.

Commenting on nationalism, Mumtaz observed that:

Muslim world was divided into more than nation states. The emergence of modern state with a sense of a new nationality caused division not only among Muslims; rather their natural resources were also divided and exploited. Islamic Ummatic identity was also replaced by national identities. (Mumtaz Ali. The history and philosophy of Islamization of knowledge pg13)

Commercialization of Education

Another major obstacle to quality assurance in Muslim Universities is commercialization of education in most Muslim countries. Commercialization by giving franchise and license to business minds in the west has done more harm than good to Muslim education. Knowledge is something that grows overtime and not what one can perfectly determine the immediate result. The business people in educational sector from the west who established the extension of schools on Muslim soil have their own agenda to accomplish. They are basically profit oriented; they only focus on minimizing cost and maximizing their reward. Though the intention to increase qualified and professional manpower in most Muslim country is ideal, but the question is have they been able to achieve this? To what extent has the transfer of soft technology (knowledge) to their people benefited them in the long-run? The same people who established branches of their higher education in Muslim countries rank the Universities as less effective in terms of providing quality education to their people.

Commercialization of education is reflected in kazim's commodification of knowledge. Kazmi's commodification of knowledge implies subjecting knowledge to the same condition and produced for the same purpose as any other commodity, i.e exchange. He espoused that quantity considerations present no problem or less of a problem in determining the exchange value of a commodity than do quality concerns particularly in the field of knowledge where quality is not easily definable. (Yedullah Kazmi: notion of murabbi in Islam: An Islamic critique of trends in contemporary education pg22)

Kazim also argued that proliferations of western Universities and their campuses in developing countries and the eagerness with which they are granted license by the host government is an extreme example of commodification of higher education. He furthered that franchising fast food restaurant like pizza Hut is the same way the western Universities was franchised and that this

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has brought nothing but a parasitic relationship, because, the foreign western Universities only came to get capital to fund their research at home. And this is nothing but a pseudo-modernization and development of the developing and the third-world countries, which after all is the vision of Schultz's theory which holds out to leaders and masses of the developing nations. Kazmi concluded that in the context of commodification of knowledge, hence it would be a meaningless effort or exercise to mark the differences among education, learning and gathering information. In such a context, education would collapse into collecting and gathering information. Function of education in other words, would be reduced to teaching information retrieval skills.

Good and Dynamic Leaders

Mumtaz Ali (2008) citing ibn khaldun in *Al-Muqaddimah* and Sayyid Mawdudi in the Islamic Movement said:

Dynamic of values, power and change have contended that the rise and fall of nations and civilizations mainly depends on the role of leaders and scholars. (Mumtaz Ali. *The history and philosophy of Islamization of knowledge* pg20)

Today most of the developing countries lack visionary leaders in virtually all their major sectors. This is one of the reasons for dwindling in quality of University output in Muslim world. Most of those people that are saddle with the mantle of leadership responsibility rise to the upper echelon of power via political appointment. Most of them lack appropriate leadership prowess, intuitive ability and professional proficiency to direct and govern their positions. Mumtaz Ali (2008) empirically confirmed this by quoting the statement caliph Umar who asked Zaiyad Ibn Hudayr if he knew what will destroy Islam. Zaiyad answered in affirmation, and Umar said "Islam will be destroyed by the mistakes of scholars, the argument of the hypocrites using the book and government by leaders who are in error. Mumtaz buttress this by citing the hadiths of the holy prophet who was reported to have said that "there are two classes in my Ummah who if they are right; and if they go wrong the Ummah will go wrong: they are the rulers and the scholars.

He concluded by saying that:

Unfortunately, the attention of Ummah has been diverted from this reality of the responsibility of leadership, instead of bringing development in Muslim world the leadership both political and intellectual caused decline. They were unable to understand the affairs of the world with ijthadic qualities. Leadership who can take decisions courageously on the Islamic worldview? We badly lack that leadership. (Mumtaz Ali. *The history and philosophy of Islamization of knowledge* pg20)

Rational and Creative Thinking

Creativity and rational thinking are both endowed to man by Allah. The ability to think constructively and rationally are both latent in man. To develop these duo gift for concrete and meaningful outcome require quality and timely education. Today in most Islamic Universities,

creativity and rational thinking have lent credence to the notion that the qualities of students graduating from these Universities are not internationally competitive. We concentrate much on adoption and usage of creativity of the west and rendered our own initiative idle and dormant. We are so pragmatic when it come to adoption and usage of western technology, ideas and innovation, but we are insensitive to what our own traditions point for us to use, thus subjecting ourselves to the dictates of the western hegemonic knowledge. Today fewer Universities students can do assignment from their own thinking everyone rely on internet for their source of knowledge they use, rather than contribute to what is on net, group discussion, academic debate had been shelved to some extent, library in most time is deserted of students except for those who chat and read newspapers. Few Muslim graduate and undergraduate reflect on what they read in Quran some students take Quran only as a spiritual book to contact when they are in despair, need or in an extreme agony. Hardly can we see students reflecting and develop concrete meaning from Quran.

Mumtaz (2008) in his comment observed:

It was as if creative thinking had been shelved. There was no urge for change from worst to better. The Muslims were generally complacent with the status quo. The Ummah was submerged in fatalism, superstitions and rigidity. When there was no creativity, the need was not felt for either development or introduction of new institutions. Mumtaz Ali. *The history and philosophy of Islamization of knowledge* pg21)

Fund

Most Universities in Muslim countries are short-funded, this also contributed to low level of creativity and rational thinking. Those who are ready to work have no fund to accomplish their mission and the idea and the mission die at the initial stage due to lack of fund. Lack of adequate fund also inhibit the curiosity to explore new area of research and findings, what is left in some universities in developing countries and third-world is modification of the existing research or changing of the research site, no new idea or new thinking in area of research- only to reproduce what has been done, this make little or no impact on the broad goal of the Ummah. However, western researchers that suggested idea of modifying topics and substitute of research location most cases came-up with new research ideas that are different from what they had done in the past. If there is no motivation and curiosity for students, teachers and lecturers to conduct research, creativity and critical thinking will be retarded and quality of knowledge, skill and attitudinal change will drop drastically.

In addition, inadequate fund impede the use of latest technology to support learning in most universities especially in area of natural sciences and Engineering which needed to be in tune with the latest technology for the teaching and learning to effective and competitive.

Suggested solutions

If there is no gap between current level of outcome and desired level of outcome, there is no need and if there is no need, no curiosity to solve problem. Having identified the above-discussed points as some of the hindrances to quality assurance in Muslims universities, suggestions on how to overcome them may portray one of the strategies that can be used to subdue those hurdles. Prior to the discussion of the above-mentioned obstacles, list of ten obstacles considered to be pressing was suggested and developed inform of questionnaire and distributed to 20 postgraduate student in Kulliyah of education of International University Malaysia (IIUM). The students after ranking the suggested obstacles from the most pressing to the least pressing, those highly ranked obstacles formed the bases of our discussion in this paper. The students also added that if these entire problems are mitigated or solve quality assurance in Muslims universities would be enhanced. The following in addition to the above-mentioned points are suggested as the way out of the problem.

- 1) Getting rid of Secularism problem-designing common certificate for entry requirement among universities in the Muslim world
- 2) Adequate funding of Universities in Muslim world
- 3) Establishing an appropriate academic Language centre like CELPAD in IIUM
- 4) Poverty Alleviation program- using social demand approach for education
- 5) Government should take complete control of education
- 6) Scholarship for less privilege and the needy among Muslim students and encouraging especially the postgraduate students to participate in educational conferences, workshop and seminar to broaden their horizon
- 7) Research grants for lecturers and students

A Quality L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P Model

Ultimately, everyone knew that the most crucial challenges to the universally accepted quality of the universities in the Muslim World is the non-existence of the leader that could rightfully lead the Muslims. This miserable situation happened after the declined of the Muslim Khalifah centered in Turkey in 1920s. There is no unity of mind, solid decision, uniform action, standardized system, or solidarity of Muslim brotherhood. This paper would like to suggest a 'LEADERSHIP Model' as a solution for the Muslim solidarity to move forward in a more appropriate mechanism particularly in the educational institution. This means- L-Leader, E-Educational, A-Aim, D-Delivery, E-Empowerment, R-Robust, S-Style, H-Humble, I-Intelligent, P-Piety. The **leader** with the 'Imam' concept who supposed to be obeyed by the followers. The nature of **education** or truth as the niche of the university is sacred and across discipline with reality, fact and figures. The **aim** as the destination of the institution has to be clearly outlined, such as the IIUM's vision and mission – IIICEs or TRIPLE ICE acronym of Integration, Islamization, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence. The **delivery** of subject matters with attractive methodology is vital for the eager acceptance of knowledge by the students as the immediate clients. The **empowerment** of rules, regulations, and certification should not be tolerated in order to achieve the desired quality. The management and staff at all

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level to shoulder the responsibilities with **robust** and resilient. It is the leader's choice to impose the effective **styles** such as autocratic, democratic, laizer faire, dictator, charismatic, and transformational. **Humble** to Allah or zuhud mend to a successful leader who would be respected and appreciated by their followers and colleagues. Leader must be **intelligent**. The fundamental accountability of a leader is to bring goodness and prevent evils that bring individual to become a **pious** person or muttaqin who will be absolutely assisted by Allah SWT in the world and akhirat towards a true success. *Allahu- 'Alam.*

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